

JUNE 29, 1976

THE NEXT CONGRESS AND THE NEW LOOK

ANNCR:

NEXT NOVEMBER AMERICAN VOTERS WILL ELECT NOT ONLY A CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUT A NEW CONGRESS AS WELL. AND CHARLES MEDD SAYS THE EXPECTATIONS ARE THAT THE COMING 95TH CONGRESS WILL HAVE A DECIDELY NEW LOOK.

VOICE:

WHEN THE CURRENT CONGRESS WAS ELECTED IN LATE NINETEEN SEVENTY-FOUR, THERE WAS MUCH TALK ABOUT REVITALIZING THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. WITH THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY BATTERED BY THE TWIN TRAGEDIES OF VIETNAM AND WATERGATE, THE TIME SEEMED RIPE FOR A SHIFT OF AT LEAST A MEASURE OF AUTHORITY FROM THE EXECUTIVE TO THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH. BUT EVEN WITH THE DEMOCRATS CLAIMING OVERWHELMING MAJORITIES IN BOTH HOUSES AND THE NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS CLAMORING FOR REFORM, SUCH TALK ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP SOON VANISHED. THIS CONGRESS, LIKE EARLIER ONES, HAS DONE VERY LITTLE TO RESHAPE WASHINGTON WHERE THE POWER TO LEAD AND SET LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES STILL RESTS FOR THE MOST PART IN THE WHITE HOUSE.

BUT FOR VARIOUS REASONS THE CONGRESS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL ELECT IN NOVEMBER WILL HAVE A DIFFERENT LOOK AND, DEPENDING ON WHO WINS THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST, PERHAPS A NEW ROLE AS WELL. NOT SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR HAVE SO MANY INCUMBENTS DECIDED NOT TO SEEK RE-ELECTION -- ABOUT ONE IN EVERY TEN OF THE FIVE HUNDRED THIRTY-FIVE MEMBERS OF BOTH HOUSES ARE GIVING UP THEIR SEATS.

AMONG THOSE RETIRING ARE THREE OF THE MOST POWERFUL MEN IN CONGRESS -- THE DEMOCRATIC SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, CARL ALBERT; THE REPUBLICAN MINORITY LEADER OF THE SENATE, HUGH SCOTT; AND THE SENATE MAJORITY LEADER, DEMOCRAT MIKE MANSFIELD. ALL THREE ARE OLDER VETERANS OF NATIONAL POLITICS, EACH GIFTED IN HIS OWN WAY, BUT NONE NOTED FOR VIGOROUS OR PARTISAN LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. A SCRAMBLE FOR SUCCESSION HAS ALREADY BEGUN AMONG YOUNGER LEGISLATORS WHO BELIEVE THAT CONGRESS NEEDS A DIFFERENT KIND OF LEADERSHIP IF IT'S TO ASSERT ITS PROPER ROLE IN THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS.

WHAT THAT ROLE IS WILL BE DETERMINED IN LARGE PART BY WHO IS ELECTED PRESIDENT. IF IT'S A REPUBLICAN, THE DEMOCRATS -- WHO SEEM LIKELY TO RETAIN CONTROL OF CONGRESS -- WILL AGAIN FIND THEMSELVES IN AN ADVERSARY POSITION. IF IT'S JIMIY CARTER, THEY WILL HAVE A FELLOW PARTY MEMBER IN THE WHITE HOUSE BUT A POLITICAL OUTSIDER WHOSE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES ARE STILL UNCLEAR. SO, EVEN IF THE NEXT CONGRESS HAS AN ENTIRELY NEW FACE, THERE'S NO ASSURANCE THAT THE OLD PROBLEMS OF MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BETTER WILL GO AWAY.

GH/PBM